

Postcolonial ecofeminism in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

Youngsuk Chae*

University of North Carolina at Pembroke, USA

This article foregrounds Arundhati Roy's postcolonial ecofeminist perspective in her novel *The God of Small Things* (1997). Roy has become recognized as an environmental and political activist through her criticism of postcolonial India's mal-development. Although she is cynical about state-sponsored development projects, her criticism is focused not on the idea of development per se, but on the hierarchy of dualisms that legitimizes the exploitation of nature by the human, of women by men and of the oppressed by the powerful. *The God of Small Things* interrogates the ways such hierarchies operate through mechanisms such as patriarchal ideology and an apparently rational economic logic. Roy's critique of environmental exploitation in postcolonial India reveals the interconnectedness of ecological deterioration and oppression based on gender, class and race. Such exploitation calls for an examination of postcolonial environment issues from an ecofeminist viewpoint. The convergence of postcolonialism with ecofeminism – what is here called postcolonial ecofeminism – is exemplified in Roy's novel.

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Growing concerns over the destruction of the natural environment have spurred on environmental movements at local and global levels. As Laura Pulido (1996) points out, environmental movements have uncovered “structural forces that produce conditions of environmental degradation” (14), and the development-oriented agenda and prevailing forces of the global economy have caused ecological destruction and the displacement of people from their livelihood. Environmental movements in developing countries and postcolonial societies have articulated environmental issues in connection with economic, racial and sexual inequity. A number of critics have noted that postcolonialism and environmentalism have concerns in common. Pablo Mukherjee (2006) pinpoints the interconnections of the two fields as being their “comprehensive critique of European modernity, in particular its core components of capitalism, colonialism/imperialism and patriarchy”, in that both position themselves “as being integral to the oppositional activism of decolonization and environmental/green movements” (145). Ramachandra Guha's (2000) accounts of a peasant revolt against state-sponsored development plans in postcolonial India clearly show the intersections between postcolonial and environmental issues and expose the underlying economic and material factors of environmental exploitation (150–184). Similarly, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (2010) underline the conjunctions of postcolonial and environmental crises and state that one of the major tasks of postcolonial ecocriticism is to “contest western

*Email: youngsuk.chae@uncp.edu

ideologies of development” (27). They argue, moreover, that postcolonial ecocriticism’s critique of a development-oriented view as a cause of environmental exploitation exposes the neocolonial economic interests of development projects; and a key question to ask is whose interests are served by development plans. If the development project is administrated by the state, Huggan and Tiffin claim, “the top-down forms of economic management [are] bound to the neocolonialist imperatives of global corporate commerce and the post-independence state” (52). Postcolonial ecocriticism in this sense emerges as an economic and ecological response to neocolonial globalization and development projects backed by global capital.

Global capitalism’s predatory economic domination is based on unequal power relations between developed and developing countries, and the inequality of power on local and global levels which causes the “othered” countries and subjugated peoples to be objects of exploitation in the name of development. Of special concern is how globalization as “an extension of patriarchal capitalism” (5), as Heather Eaton and Lois Ann Lorentzen (2003) put it, has precipitated ecological crises and gender concerns, and how patriarchal capitalist development agendas have served the ideology of linear progress. Gayatri Spivak (1995b) points out the connections between patriarchal capitalism and global capital, emphasizing the confluence between patriarchy and neocolonial globalization in India (198). In a similar vein, Vandana Shiva (1989) calls development a “new project of western patriarchy” (1) and states that “ecological destruction” and the marginalization of subjugated women have been the “inevitable results of most development projects” (xvii). Spivak’s and Shiva’s counter-development ideas are in alignment with postcolonial environmental agendas as well as ecological feminist (ecofeminist) concerns.

The development project in postcolonial societies and its impact on marginalized women and other subjugated people necessitates an examination of postcolonial environmental issues from an ecofeminist viewpoint. Arundhati Roy’s novel *The God of Small Things* (1997), which delineates interconnections between subordinated human beings and non-human nature, furnishes such a viewpoint, although it has been mostly understood as part of her environmentalist viewpoint rather than as evidence of an ecofeminist stance. For example, Mukherjee (2010) writes that for Roy, “any serious political and cultural consideration is thus always already environmental” (18). Divya Anand (2005) reads the novel as Roy’s portrayal of the caste-ridden norms of society and the environmental struggles of Dalit or untouchable communities (95). In a similar vein, Aarthi Vadde (2009) argues that “Roy’s narrative portrays the backwater as a social space – an ecological collectivity where the bonds among humans are enabled” (536). While these criticisms are valuable and highlight Roy’s critique of environmental exploitation in postcolonial India, what they overlook is the ideological interconnectedness between ecological deterioration and oppression based on gender, class and race – the very idea that Roy’s ecofeminist perspective specifically illuminates. As Karen Warren (2000) notes in *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, “Ecological feminists (‘ecofeminists’) claim that there are important connections between the unjustified dominations of women, people of color, children, and the poor and the unjustified domination of nature” (1). The convergence of postcolonialism with ecofeminism – what I call postcolonial ecofeminism – is exemplified in Roy’s interrogation of development in postcolonial Indian society.

Roy’s novel, *The God of Small Things*, views the hierarchy of dualisms between men and women, development and underdevelopment as an ideological justification for domination. Historically, as Val Plumwood (2002) claims, this dualism has legitimized

oppression of women and the destruction of nature (4). Roy critiques the justification of the destruction of nature and the oppression of subjugated human beings as an inevitable process in the progressive development of postcolonial India. Such oppression is well depicted through the ill-fated inter-caste love of the main characters of *The God of Small Things*: Ammu, a divorced Syrian Christian, and Velutha, an untouchable. Set in Ayemenem in Kerala, the novel interweaves past events of 1969 with the present day of 1992: Rahel, Ammu's daughter, returns to Ayemenem from America, after hearing of her twin brother Estha's return – 23 years on from the deaths of their half-English cousin Sophie and Velutha, and soon after their mother Ammu's death. Estha and Rahel have drifted apart over the years due to the traumatic events of 1969, in which they witnessed the police violently beating Velutha and then were forced to falsely denounce him as Sophie's kidnapper and the cause of her death, although they (and the reader) know that she had drowned by accident. Highlighting India's rigid social structure and society's collective violence against othered human beings, Roy's novel discloses the injustice underlying the hierarchical dualism and instrumental reasoning that are used to justify violence against the disenfranchised.

Indeed, Roy's sense of outrage at the violence against subjugated women and lower caste groups who are cast as inferior beings by the dominant power group in postcolonial India reflects an ecofeminist consciousness. Her critique of patriarchal violence, domination of subjugated people and the exploitation of the natural environment are extended to the national and global levels, where she exposes the violence wrought by rationalizations of economic logic and optimistic narratives of national development. Roy's postcolonial ecofeminism reflects, in many ways, on the agendas of postcolonial globalization that have brought about environmental damage and violent exploitation of nature. Her portrayal of the destructive impact of global capital on postcolonial Indian society, whose ongoing toxic development causes disaster to the environment and impoverishment of the disempowered, calls for social, economic and environmental justice for oppressed women, marginalized human beings, and nature.

“Smelly paradise” and violence of development on the dispossessed

The dismantling of the Big. Big bombs, big dams, big ideologies, big contradictions, big countries, big wars, big heroes, big mistakes. Perhaps it will be the Century of the Small. Perhaps right now, this very minute, there's a small god up in heaven readying herself for us. Could it be? Could it *possibly* be? (Roy 1999, 12; emphasis in original)

In this passage from her essay “The Greater Common Good”, Roy critiques political and economic ideologies that support “Big” ideas, especially extensive state-administered dam projects and the states’ “civilizing” missions. Roy has been known as an activist for her protest against the building of thousands of dams in postcolonial India, which have caused environmental disasters and displacement of millions of people. This “Big” plan, which Roy implicates in the title of her essay, serves as a legitimate rationale for the greater common good, and contributes in many ways to justifying the suppression of “Small” voices and the exploitation of other subordinated beings and the natural environment. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy highlights the oppressive aspects of these Big ideas with respect to othered beings, such as oppressed women, other subjugated people, and nature; furthermore, she underlines the interconnectedness among oppressive mechanisms – hierarchical dualisms, patriarchal ideology and rationalized economic logic – in postcolonial Indian society.

Roy criticizes the ways in which dualistic constructions naturalize hierarchies (such as between men and women, development and non-development), and how they justify exploitation of the natural environment under the guise of social progress. In the setting of *The God of Small Things*, she exposes the violence of dualisms and highlights the environmental destruction resulting from mismanaged development projects. The river in Ayemenem serves as a symbolic background indicating the economic condition of people and their livelihood, as well as ecological environments. Estha, upon returning to Ayemenem after a 23 year absence, finds that the old History House – an abandoned house once owned by Kari Saipu, an Englishman who had an affair with a native and shot himself – has been renovated as a luxury hotel for tourists, bearing a new name, God's Own Country. As this name suggests, the updated modern hotel epitomizes a developed modern India. However, walking down along the river dam, Estha witnesses the ecological degradation and toxicity caused by the state development plan:

The hotel guests were ferried across the backwaters, straight from Cochin. They arrived by speedboat, opening up a V of foam on the water, leaving behind a rainbow film of gasoline. The view from the hotel was beautiful, but here too the water was thick and toxic. No Swimming signs had been put up in stylish calligraphy. They had built a tall wall to screen off the slum and prevent it from encroaching on Kari Saipu's estate. There wasn't much they could do about the smell. (Roy 1997, 119)

Roy cynically calls the hotel a “smelly paradise” (120), thereby implying the ambivalence of development economics and their problematic impact on nature and people living along the river. In other words, state-supported hotel development and development projects backed by patriarchal capitalism increase the gap between the impoverished underclass and wealthy elite.

Whereas external changes such as new hotels and satellite television cables arrive in the name of society's betterment, the natural environment and conditions of those whose livelihood depends on the river have deteriorated thanks to mal-development. After more than two decades of development projects supported by dominant power groups, Estha finds a river that “smelled of shit and pesticides bought with World Bank loans. Most of the fish had died. The ones that survived suffered from fin-rot and had broken out in boils” (Roy 1997, 14). Although the development aid provided by the World Bank is not described in detail, Roy targets environmental degradation, and exposes the rationalized economic logic that ideologically justifies the sacrifice of “small” people. Rahel also notices that “downriver, a saltwater barrage had been built, in exchange for votes from the influential paddy-farmer lobby” (118). The barrage was built by the state government with the idea of regulating the inflow of salt water from the backwaters, making it possible for farmers to have two rice crops a year instead of one. However, what he finds are dead fish scattered on the mud banks, even though it is a rainy season.

By foregrounding the deteriorating natural environment, Roy questions the rationale of capitalist economic development and denounces government-sponsored development plans, such as the big dam projects, that have caused the displacement of millions of people. She further shows how the nation's development plans were motivated by dominant power groups' interests and realised through an abuse of power, which Graham Huggan (2004) calls the “tyrannies of the modern Indian State” (705). In other words, development projects aided by the modern Indian state reveal the violence wrought by patriarchal global capitalism. In this regard, Spivak claims:

the developing national states are not only linked by the common thread of profound ecological loss, the loss of forest and river as foundation of life, but also plagued by the complicity, however apparently remote, of the power lines of local developers with the forces of global capital. (1995a, 380)

Similarly, Roy exposes the local, national, and global interconnections behind national development projects, “the nexus comprising politicians, bureaucrats, and dam-construction companies, [...] and more often than not, the friendly neighborhood World Bank” (1999, 30). She interrogates the World Bank’s justification for the massive displacement of people from dam areas with reference to a statement made by David Hopper, the World Bank’s vice-president for South Asia: “the Bank does not usually include the cost of drainage in its irrigation projects in South Asia because irrigation projects *with* adequate drainage are just too expensive” (Roy 1999, 70; emphasis in original). As Hopper admits, it “costs five times as much to provide adequate drainage” (70), and the irrigation project would not be cost-effective if such costs were included. As a consequence, World Bank-funded dams have caused the submergence of villages near the river banks, forcing people in those areas to leave, and making them “developmental refugees”, “the calamitous fallouts of (largely World-Bank funded) megadams” (Nixon 2010, 63). In other words, World Bank-funded and government-administered big dam projects have increased poverty among the dispossessed. In this light, development aid is another form of economic domination that eventually makes a developing country more dependent on developed countries. Roy clearly exposes the postcolonial Indian government’s economic dependence on the First World, disclosing the link between colonialism and development aid. As Amitava Kumar (2003) points out, the furnishing of aid by the World Bank is a neocolonial form of economic domination, and the World Bank functions as “an agent” of concretizing global capitalism (xix).

Those displaced from the polluted river and adjacent land are mostly the economically dispossessed, and Roy makes it clear that environmental issues are also about the lack of economic justice. In the novel, Velutha’s hut, located near the river, represents the disenfranchised status of the dispossessed subaltern, which, in Ranajit Guha’s (1988) words, refers to “the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender” (35). Velutha, his half-paralysed brother and their father all live in a small laterite hut, downriver from the Ayemenem house, that stands low to the ground except for four corners: “One corner for cooking, one for clothes, one for bedding rolls, one for dying in” (Roy 1997, 197). Untouchables like Velutha and other lower-class groups in society do not have equal access to resources, and the state-sponsored development projects exacerbate their economic marginalization. Roy interrogates development- and progress-oriented views of history supported by Christian ideology through her depiction of the impoverished condition of Velutha’s family and a parodic image of Jesus in the calendar hanging on the wall of their tiny hut:

On the wall behind him there was a benign, mouse-haired calendar-Jesus with lipstick and rouge, and a lurid, jeweled heart glowing through his clothes. The bottom quarter of the calendar (the part with the dates on it) frilled out like a skirt. Jesus in a mini. (199)

Roy cynically portrays the influence of Christianity on Indian society, which began with British colonization. Through the influence of the colonizer’s “civilizing” mission, many untouchables converted to Christianity. However, the converted untouchables later realized that “they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire. [...] After Independence they found they were not entitled to any government benefits like job

reservations or bank loans at low interest rates” (71). The postcolonial Indian government’s development plans for the betterment of society helped to enrich privileged economic groups by maximizing inequity and economic injustice against the disenfranchised and dispossessed.

Unlike the patriarchal capitalist view of development and the exploitation of nature as a marker of progress, Velutha – though a carpenter and engineer who knows more about the machines in the factory than anyone else – does not have a reductionist scientific view: his outlook does not exclude what Indian scientist and feminist Vandana Shiva calls “ecological and holistic ways of knowing which understand and respect nature’s processes and interconnectedness as *science*” (1989, 14–15; emphasis in original). Velutha does not use his scientific knowledge to manipulate or dominate nature; he finds that his world belongs to nature, which is interconnected with small living things. He swims across the river to meet Ammu waiting for him on the other side:

His feet touched the muddy riverbed. As he rose from the dark river and walked up the stone steps, she [Ammu] saw that the world they stood in was his. That he belonged to it. That it belonged to him. The water. The mud. The trees. The fish. The stars. (Roy 1997, 315–316)

For Ammu and Velutha, small insects, the river and natural environments are allies that forge reciprocal links between human beings and nature. Indeed, Ammu’s and Velutha’s shared view of the interconnected world and their resistance to social and economic injustice in postcolonial Indian society become ways of solidifying their inter-caste relationship.

However, as the deaths of Velutha and Ammu imply, disenfranchised people and small things in society and nature have been “bullied all their lives by Someone Big” (Roy 1997, 173), and the destruction of nature has been justified as an inevitable sacrifice in the process of development in postcolonial India. Velutha’s and Ammu’s resistance to the oppressive Big system through their inter-caste relationship may be understood as a challenge to the hierarchy of dualisms that justifies the exploitation of nature and subordinated people. Moreover, their challenge to capitalist patriarchy and conscious opposition to such dualisms exemplifies an ecofeminist consciousness that transcends gender divides. As Ariel Salleh (1997) claims, ecofeminism “builds bridges with progressive elements in the men’s movement” (xii), while taking up a stance against patriarchal capitalism.

Patriarchal violence against othered beings

Roy discloses the oppression and exploitation underlying the hierarchy of dualisms that sets men over women, touchables over untouchables, and Big Things over small things. She also shows how the Big Things – the dominant power systems that support the existing order of society – instrumentalize people at the bottom and justify dominant social ideologies in order to maintain their power and economic privileges.

Such dualisms between men and women, Self and the Other, have contributed to the legitimizing of patriarchal violence towards women and the domination of disenfranchised people. Maria Mies (1986) defines the term patriarchy as “the system which maintains women’s exploitation and oppression” (37), and claims that capitalism is the “contemporary manifestation of patriarchy [which] constitutes the mostly invisible underground of the visible capitalist system” (38). In *The God of Small Things*, the

patriarch's violence and unequal treatment of women is depicted through the actions of Ammu's father, Shri Benaan John Ipe (Pappachi). Pappachi's beatings of his wife, Soshamma (Mammachi), increase when his sense of superiority diminishes after he retires from Government Service and discovers the success of his wife's pickling business, which she runs from her kitchen. Indeed, Pappachi's abuse of patriarchal power is linked to his diminished economic power. He regularly abuses Mammachi and Ammu, whom he even drives out of their home on cold winter nights, yet Mammachi endures her husband's violent beatings, as if naturally accepting the powerless status of Indian women. Ammu, however, gradually recognizes her father's cruelty and patriarchal violence: "As a child, she had learned very quickly to disregard the Father Bear Mother Bear stories she was given to read. In her version, Father Bear beat Mother Bear with brass vases. Mother Bear suffered those beatings with mute resignation" (Roy 1997, 171). As Ammu grows older, she develops a "sense of injustice" towards her father, who turns into a "monstrous, suspicious bully" (171–172) of his wife and daughter.

Unlike her brother Chacko Ipe, who receives an Oxford education, Ammu's wish to further her education is denied by her father, since he believes "a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl" (Roy 1997, 38). Her sudden decision to marry a Hindu man who works on the tea estates in Calcutta provides an escape from her abusive father and from her sense of hopelessness at home. Yet despite her desperate efforts to flee her unhappy home, Ammu faces patriarchal violence again in her marriage. Her husband turns out to be an alcoholic; when he is about to be fired, his English manager, Mr Hollick, suggests to him that "Ammu be sent to his bungalow to be looked after" (41). Angered at her husband's negotiated deal with Mr Hollick, conducted as if her body were a sexual object, Ammu does not respond to his suggestion. Her husband, infuriated by her silent resistance, "suddenly lunged at her, grabbed her hair, punched her" (42). His patriarchal desire to control and dominate her is revealed through his irrational violence. Just like Pappachi's cruel attitude toward Ammu and Mammachi, Ammu's husband's violent and irrational behavior reflects his assumption of patriarchal superiority that justifies suppressions of women and othered beings. Indeed, when Ammu's husband begins to beat her children, she decides to return to her parents in Ayemenem, "to everything that she had fled from only a few years ago. Except that now she had two young children. And no more dreams" (42).

The patriarchal violence of both Pappachi and Ammu's husband is further revealed through Ammu's brother, Chacko, who becomes the man of the house after Pappachi dies. While staying in her parents' house, Ammu works in the family factory, Paradise Pickles & Preserves, which Chacko names and expands after he returns from London, having divorced an English woman named Margaret. Chacko registers it as a partnership and informs Mammachi that she is his "sleeping partner" (Roy 1997, 55), indicating that she has no day-to-day control over the factory. He always refers to the business as "my Factory, my pineapples, my pickles" (56). Although Ammu contributes to the factory as much work as she is able, Chacko reminds her that "a daughter has no claim to the property" (56). His view of women discloses his patriarchal capitalist perspective and the hierarchical dualism legitimizing male superiority over women that India's patriarchal society upholds. In Mies's words, Chacko is the family's capitalist patriarch, and his patriarchal capitalist view reinforces the subordination of women through unpaid work in the household, which eventually contributes to sustaining patriarchal domination as well as "capitalist accumulation" (Mies 1986, ix). As for Chacko's patriarchal domination, Ammu calls it an ideological belief in "male chauvinist society" (Roy 1997, 56), thus revealing not only her opposition to inequality and

the injustice inflicted on women in patriarchal society, but also her feminist consciousness.

The older generation's traditional patriarchal views of male privilege heighten Ammu's sense of injustice, as Mammachi's differing attitudes towards Chacko and Ammu reveal. Even though Mammachi has been abused by her husband, she endorses this patriarchal ideology and utilizes Ammu's labor in the pickling factory. Ammu's body is economically exploited by Mammachi and Chacko; in Gayatri Spivak's words, "the structure of exploitation is compounded by patriarchal social relations" (1994, 84). Mammachi supports patriarchal values because of her own need for financial security and material necessities, and she justifies Chacko's promiscuous sexual relationships with the women in the factory as a "Man's Needs" (Roy 1997, 160). She even arranges "a separate entrance built for Chacko's room, which was at the eastern end of the house, so that the objects of his 'Needs' wouldn't have to go traipsing *through* the house" (160–161; emphasis in original). Whereas Mammachi condones Chacko's "libertine relationships" (160) with the women in the factory, she considers Ammu's relationship with the untouchable Velutha who works in the factory "reckless" (44) and irrational: "[Mammachi] thought of her naked, coupling in the mud with a man who was nothing but a filthy *coolie*. She imagined it in vivid detail: a Paravan's coarse black hand on her daughter's breast. [...] *Like animals*" (244; emphasis in original). Mammachi despises Ammu and looks down on her as if she is beneath human status. Contrary to Chacko's and Mammachi's judgment of Ammu as irrational, Ammu's view of Velutha is based on her sound judgment, which transcends society's rigid hierarchy. Ammu's relationship with Velutha, lasting only two weeks, begins after she finds an attachment to, and a sense of solidarity with, the subjugated others who are treated as lesser beings in society, and after she finds that her family discriminates against her children, believing them to be illegitimate.

Whereas Ammu's twin children are treated by Ammu's aunt, Navomi Ipe (Baby Kochamma), as "doomed, fatherless waifs" (Roy 1997, 44), with no right to be in the house, the arrival in Ayemenem of Chacko's daughter Sophie, following the death of the husband of Chacko's ex-wife Margaret, Sophie's mother, in a car accident, is celebrated as a big family event, and Sophie is treated as special. Ammu clearly sees how her children are looked down upon by the family members due to her status as a divorced woman; Rahel, Ammu's daughter, slips out of the elaborate official greeting staged by Baby Kochamma and goes to see Velutha. As Ammu watches Velutha lifting her as if she were his child, and sees the delight in the child's face, she feels a sense of affinity with him:

Suddenly Ammu hoped that it *had* been him that Rahel saw in the march. She hoped it had been him that had raised his flag and knotted arm in anger. She hoped that under his careful cloak of cheerfulness he housed a living, breathing anger against the smug, ordered world that she so raged against. (167; emphasis in original)

Ammu feels Velutha's anger against the social oppression and directs her outrage at the rigid social hierarchies that have led to her own domination as well as that of othered people. She shares with Velutha an opposition to the underlying violence in the hierarchical dualism that justifies the oppression of women and outcast groups. As Ammu thinks of Velutha as "The God of Loss, *The God of Small Things*" (210), their solidarity becomes possible because they, both disenfranchised, have experienced systematic oppression within the confluence of gender, class and caste.

However, Ammu's and Velutha's defiance, shown through their inter-caste sexual relationship, is viewed as subversive. Velutha is fired from the factory and Ammu is locked up in her bedroom "like the family lunatic in a medieval household" (Roy 1997, 239) after Velutha's father, Vellya Paapen, reports the relationship to Mammachi and Baby Kochamma. Soon after, Baby Kochamma goes to Police Inspector Thomas Mathew, accusing Velutha of being a rapist; she justifies her action as an effort to save the family's reputation from disgrace. Upon receiving this false report, the inspector dispatches the police to arrest Velutha, and Estha and Rahel witness the policemen brutally beating him to death in their "attempt to instill order into a world gone wrong" (246). Two decades later, the twins realize that the police's collective violence is their way of exorcizing a fear of being subverted, "civilization's fear of nature, men's fear of women, power's fear of powerlessness. Man's subliminal urge to destroy what he could neither subdue nor deify. Men's Needs" (292). Men's need to dominate women and oppress the powerless corresponds to the ideology of authoritarian patriarchy, which Roy extends to the disenfranchised of India's caste system. Although Ammu's and Velutha's opposition to patriarchal violence is violently crushed by the police, their resistance makes the oppressed visible, exposing the injustice and inequality that legitimize the hierarchy of dualisms.

Economic violence and social injustice

Roy's critiques of the destruction of the natural environment, patriarchal violence and domination of marginalized women and low-caste groups are extended to the economic sphere. Carolyn Merchant (1990) argues that "capitalist patriarchy" and "male-dominated power structure" are root causes of the oppression of women and destruction of non-human nature (103). In *The God of Small Things*, capitalist patriarchy is the ideological justification for the exploitation of subjugated women and lower castes, such as the untouchables. Postcolonial Indian society's systematic violence toward the disenfranchised is shown through Velutha's death. Baby Kochamma considers that in getting rid of Velutha after hearing about his relationship with Ammu, by pressuring Mammachi to fire him from the factory, she has saved the family name and Ammu, but she is motivated mainly by her personal desire for revenge on the Naxalites and her "fear of being dispossessed" (Roy 1997, 67). Velutha is known to be a card-holding member of the Marxist Party of India and a Naxalite. Landlords and upper-class people are frightened after rumors that the Naxalites had "organized peasants into fighting cadres, seized land, expelled the owners and established People's Courts to try Class Enemies" (66). Baby Kochamma's vindictive act reflects a need to extract revenge for her humiliation by a man in the labor union march, and she redirects her anger personally towards Velutha, who was seen on the march. On the family's trip to Cochin airport to pick up Sophie and Margaret, their car gets stuck in the middle of the march, which consists of party workers, students, and touchable and untouchable laborers. While the car is moving slowly along with the crowds, Rahel sees Velutha "marching with a red flag. In a white shirt and mundu with angry veins in his neck" (68). But he disappears from view after he hears Rahel calling his name. Then a man in the march approaches the car and calls Baby Kochamma "Modalali Mariakutty" (landlord) and forces her to wave his red flag. Feeling humiliated, Baby Kochamma later directs her personal anger at Velutha and begins to hate him, since "in her mind he grew to represent the march" (78). Baby Kochamma tells other family members: "We should keep an eye on him. [...] If he starts this Union business in the factory ... I've

noticed some signs, some rudeness, some ingratitude” (78). Baby Kochamma, whose well-being is maintained by the family patriarchs, upholds capitalist patriarchy, and directs her fear of being dispossessed towards Velutha.

Unlike his father Vellya Paapen, who internalized the ancient caste system as the natural social order, Velutha, educated in the Christian Mission Society, sees the oppressive social hierarchies as embedded in the caste system. As Roy explains elsewhere, “social inequality has been institutionalized in the caste system for centuries” (2001, 139). Despite the independent Indian government’s announcement of the abolition of the age-old caste system, it remains alive in the community, which regards untouchables as outcasts. Vellya Paapen is fearful because of his son’s “lack of hesitation” and “unwanted assurance” (Roy 1997, 73), worrying that the touchables might misconstrue him as being insolent or disrespectful. However, Velutha fights against the oppressive caste system, joins the labor union, and participates in the march because he is struggling for economic survival. Along with Velutha, other people on the march are untouchable and touchable low-wage workers, fighting for their livelihood and better working conditions. Their demands reflect the economic struggles of socially marginalized and economically exploited groups and their subaltern condition. Spivak points out the importance of the transformation of “the consciousness of the subaltern” and of giving the subaltern, “the subject of exploitation”, a voice to speak (1994, 82–92). The subalterns in the labor union march who come together to voice their livelihood issues, and to demand equality as well as social and economic justice for the exploited, reflect Spivak’s image of the subaltern.

In *The God of Small Things*, the social and economic injustice inflicted upon marginalized groups in postcolonial Indian society is revealed through discrimination against untouchables, which involves another form of identity politics, legitimizing social oppression and economic exploitation of the untouchable caste. Although Velutha is a Paravan, he is a Christian and therefore casteless. However, Mammachi calls him a coolie when she is angry at him for his relationship with Ammu, signifying the instrumentalization of untouchables in society as indentured slaves. She inadvertently discloses the notable fact that hierarchical dualisms – such as that between touchables and untouchables – reinforce the economic exploitation of oppressed people. Velutha is a valuable laborer in maintaining the factory and sustaining the Ipe family’s upper-class status. Mammachi recognizes his skills as a carpenter and engineer, for it is Velutha who reassembles a bottle-sealing machine that Chacko bought for the factory, and who knows how to run the machines. Although Mammachi hires him as a factory carpenter, putting him in charge of general maintenance of the machines, she pays him less than a touchable carpenter but more than other untouchables. She reminds him that “he ought to be grateful that he was allowed on the factory premises at all, and allowed to touch things that Touchables touched” calling it “a big step for a Paravan” (Roy 1997, 74). Mammachi tactfully utilizes Velutha’s skills, yet exploits his untouchable status. The hierarchical division of labor based on the caste division between touchables and untouchables renders the untouchables an economically disposable group, and the caste system serves to reinforce their structured inequality and economic exploitation as cheap labor. It is this social and economic injustice that Velutha seeks to convey to Mammachi and society in general, and joining the labor union is his way of fighting for social and economic justice for the dispossessed. However, Velutha’s attempt to challenge injustice and inequality is seen as a threat by the dominant power groups, making him susceptible to retaliatory measures.

Similarly, Baby Kochamma, after telling Inspector Thomas Mathew about Velutha's "attempted rape" of Ammu, adds that she saw Velutha in the march and that he is a Naxalite. Before dispatching the police to arrest Velutha, the inspector checks with Pillai, an opportunist politician who hopes to expel Velutha from the Communist Party, and is told that "Velutha did not have the patronage or the protection of the Communist Party. That he was on his own" (Roy 1997, 248). The inspector also opportunistically maintains his position by siding with dominant power groups. The police represent the agency of the state in sustaining the social hierarchy and hegemonic power relations, and, as their violent beating to death of Velutha shows, violence is their weapon against those who challenge such structures. As an "agent of History" the police, Roy writes, "were not arresting a man; they were exorcising fear" (293) and collecting "the dues from those who broke its laws" (292). From society's viewpoint, Velutha's death is considered "more profitable than his life had ever been" (267); it is justified as a way of sustaining its hierarchies. In a similar vein, Baby Kochamma legitimizes her accusation of Velutha as a rapist, which leads to his death, for it was a "Small Price to Pay. [...] a history lesson for future offenders" (318). In other words, Velutha's death results from society's collective violence in response to his challenge to its hierarchical structure.

Ammu also ends up paying a "small price" for her opposition to social hierarchies. She is regarded as a lunatic by her family and is locked up in her room. However, after she is freed in order to attend Sophie's funeral, Ammu goes to the police station to correct the alleged charge against Velutha. But her attempt to straighten the record and save Velutha is dismissed by Inspector Mathew, who suggests to her that she should "go home quietly." [...] Then he tapped her breasts with his baton. Gently. Tap tap" (9). He does not aim to molest her, but to "humiliate and terrorize her" (246). Velutha, accused as a violator of society's laws, was beaten to death the night before, and his body was dumped in the paupers' pit. Similarly, Ammu, forced to leave the Ayemenem house soon after, ends up dying in a rundown lodge; yet her body, not claimed by her family, is taken to a crematorium where "nobody except beggars, derelicts and the police-custody dead were cremated" (155). Ammu's and Velutha's unified act of defiance against social and economic injustice and the exploitation of disenfranchised people is considered a subversive threat, and it is the systematic violence, carried out in the name of preserving the hierarchy, that leads them to their deaths. Whereas Velutha's death was justified by the dominant group as "the Inevitable Consequence of Necessary Politics" (15), Roy, through Ammu and Velutha, defies the violence of the Big System that legitimizes the suppression of Small Things, and seeks a "new kind of politics. Not the politics of governance, but the politics of resistance. The politics of opposition" (1999, 150).

As an embodiment of Roy's politics of opposition, *The God of Small Things* poignantly portrays the interconnectedness between human beings and nature and foregrounds the hierarchical dualisms and rationalized economic logic that have been used to legitimize the exploitation of the natural environment and subordinated people in postcolonial Indian society. Roy successfully demonstrates her ecofeminism by exposing the structural and ideological interconnectedness of Indian society's oppressive systems which dominate the Small. *The God of Small Things*, in this sense, is a notable accomplishment epitomizing her call for social and economic justice for postcolonial India's other, the disenfranchised and subordinated people and non-human nature.

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Notes on contributor

Youngsuk Chae is an associate professor of English at the University of North Carolina, Pembroke. She is the author of *Politicizing Asian American Literature: Towards a Critical Multiculturalism* and co-editor of *Asian American Literature and the Environment*. Her research interests include critical race theory, postcolonial literature and ecocriticism.

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